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RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHCO #1231 3560926
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 220926Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9106
INFO RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1028

UNCLAS COTONOU 001231

SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR AF/W (DBANKS)
PARIS FOR D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KCOR](#) [KMCA](#) [BN](#)

SUBJECT: BENIN: PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS REFERRAL OF TWO
FORMER MINISTERS TO HIGH COURT ON CORRUPTION CHARGES

REF: (A) COTONOU 395; (B) COTONOU 502

¶1. On December 21, 2006, after examining a report from a parliamentary investigative committee, the Legal Committee of the National Assembly recommended that Cosme Sehlin and Valentin Houd, respectively the former ministers of Finance and Institutional Relations under President Mathieu Kerekou, be brought before the High Court of Justice to face corruption charges.

¶2. The two ministers are alleged to have been involved in the embezzlement of CFA 1 billion (\$2 million) budgeted for the design of a Computerized Permanent Voter Registry (LEPI), which has never been implemented. The referral of Sehlin and Houde follows the arrest on October 25, 2006 of Houde's predecessor, Alain Adihou, in the same case. Houd is accused of having spent improperly up to CFA 460 million (\$920,000). Former Finance Minister Sehlin, in turn, is alleged to have colluded with his colleague in authorizing the illegal payments. In July, Cosme Sehlin was arrested when a raid on his house discovered a pile of foreign currencies and an unidentified white substance; two months later he was released on bail.

¶3. The Legal Committee must now present its report to the full Assembly, which is expected to approve referral of the two ministers to the High Court of Justice, which, under Benin's Constitution, is the only court authorized to try high government officials for criminal acts committed while in office.

¶4. COMMENT: The Adihou, Sehlin and Houde cases will be a significant test of the effectiveness of the High Court of Justice. The High Court's main purpose is to try high officials, but it has been untested to date, with the Adihou referral the first case ever referred to it. END COMMENT.

HOLTZAPPLE